The Exhibit

The exhibit presents postage meter stamps from meters that were used "On The Ice" at research bases on Antarctica. Also included are meter prints from the APO post office in Christchurch which uniquely serves travellers to US and New Zealand bases on Antarctica. To date 10 postage meters are known to have been used at the US and New Zealand bases. No other country's Antarctic base has used a postage meter. The bases of interest include New Zealand Scott Base on Ross Island, the US McMurdo Station also on Ross Island, and Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station at the geographic south pole.

In the early days the bases were so small that if the station had a postage meter it was seldom used. For the last 20 years however, McMurdo and Amundsen-Scott have become small cities. The major use for the meters has been for parcels that workers must use to transport their own possessions to and from the bases due to the strict luggage weight limits for air travel between the bases and Christchurch. There was some philatelic use of the postage meters, and for the early units the only examples available are philatelic.

An effort has been made to find truly commercial letters and parcel fronts. As a result, 12 commercial items have become available for the exhibit due to the generosity of former Antarctic workers, usually from boxes in their attics.

A number of philatelic items and few postcards are included if they provide important historical evidence of the stations' purposes and development. It doesn't hurt that some of them are quite colorful.
New Zealand Scott Base

Roneo Neopost Meter 108
Before 1987

Scott Base 25th Anniversary
Date: 20 January 1982 Scott Base
Franked with Roneo Neopost Frankmaster 305
and canceled with special anniversary cachet.
Meter serial number 108.

Roneo Neopost Serial 305 at Scott Base before 1987

New Zealand Scott Base was built in 1957 on Ross Island near the existing US McMurdo “Operation Deep Freeze” base. Ross Island is the volcanic island occupied by the active volcano Mt. Erebus. A post office was maintained as part of the base. A Roneo Neopost Frankmaster 305 serial number 108 was used at the base. This model dates back to 1954 but it is not clear when this unit was actually installed. It may have always been part of the post office but apparently seldom used. The only published examples are collector covers prepared for the Scott Base 25th anniversary.

The New Zealand Post Office closed the Scott Base Post Office for financial reasons in September 1987 and removed this postage meter.

Roneo Neopost Frankmaster 305 meter number 108 used at Scott until September 1987.
When the Scott Base Post Office closed in 1987 the station Canteen Council bought a newer Frama postage meter which was placed in the canteen. In 1992 the NZ post office insisted on inspecting the meter monthly rather than at the end of the season. A logistical impracticality. The Canteen Council returned the postage meter in 1992.

Mail from Scott Base was entered into the NZ mail stream like any mail bag from a corporate mailer and canceled at Christchurch.
Meter Used as Cancellor
Scott Base often seems to have used the Frama meter as a canceller for stamped mail.

New Zealand Scott Base
Frama Meter Number F340
1987 thru 1992

Addressed cover to USA
Date: 10 December 1991 Scott Base
Not canceled at Christchurch

Addressed cover to UK.
May Have Carried a Letter.
Date: 5 February 1989 Scott Base
7 February 1989 Christchurch

Dr. J. A. McCONCHIE
Physical Geography
Research School of Earth Sciences

To

JANICE HARVIS
P.O. Box 2103
Cinnaminson, NJ 08077 USA.
Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station

Pitney-Bowes Model 5300 Serial 3345117
One of the very few examples with readable serial number. This Pitney-Bowes Model 5300 unit installed about 1987 and used until 1991. Moved to McMurdo about 1995.

Unaddressed Operation Deep Freeze Cachet
Date: 22 January 1991
Rate: 25 cents first oz + 20 cents incremental
45 cents for two oz
Paid $0.20 Meter plus $0.25 Postal Envelope
Pitney-Bowes Model 5300 Serial 3345249
This new meter was received at South Pole ca1991 after meter number 3345177 was moved to McMurdo. This meter was saw little use such that the account was canceled some time in 1998. The meter account was reinstated in January 1999. This unit replaced during the next season in September 1999.
Zipcode APO AP 96598.

Air Polarogramme—NSF Chalet at McMurdo
Date: 20 January 1999 South Pole
21 January 1999 South Pole
21 January 1999 South Pole Backstamp
9 February 1999 South Pole
16 February 1999 McMurdo Backstamp
Rate: $0.33 Domestic First Class Letter
Manuscript “First Day of the Reissue of the Meter Postage at South Pole.”
Pitney-Bowes Model 6900 Serial 5407172
This postage meter was used from January 2000 thru January 2004. This photo of South Pole Post Office in 2000 shows the PB Model 6900 on the counter.

Air Polarogramme
LC 130 Hereules the Antarctic Workhorse
Date: 18 November 2003
12 December 2003 Christchurch backstamp
Rate: $0.80 International Letter rate to New Zealand

Old South Pole Station
Base built in 1975 with dome, was constantly being buried in snow. Buildings damaged by moving ice. New base started in 1999.
The dome removed in 2010 and will be reconstructed in the US as part of an Antarctic museum.

Postcard showing old South Pole Dome Station
Date: 28 October 2000 South Pole
Rate: $0.33 Domestic First Class (used on postcard)
Correct Zipcode “APO AP”
Chilean Expedition traverse from Chilean Base
Punta Arenas to the South Pole.
Date: 5 December 2004 South Pole
Rate: $0.70 International Airmail Letter (IMM 29)
The Chilean exploration team traveled from their
Punta Arenas base to the South Pole and then returned during the 2004/2005 season.

Chilean cachets on reverse of postcard.

Postcard—First Polar Helicopter Landing
Date: 17 December 2003
Rate: $0.23 Domestic Postcard
Postcard commemorates rescue landing.
Aircraft subsequently crashed requiring further evacuations.

New and Old Stations Postcard (Reverse)
The old South Pole Station (Dome) built in 1975
was damaged by moving ice. Replaced by new base started in 1999. Postcard shows new station
(yellow building) half finished as of 2003.

Helicopter on return trip crashed 193 km north of Patriot Hills.
Injuries to both explorers required medivac to Punta Arenas.
From: [Redacted]  
Centennial Co. 80112  
USA

To: [Redacted]  
Centennial Co. 80112  
USA

SOUTH POLE, ANTARCTICA

US Amundsen Scott South Pole Base  
Pitney-Bowes Model 6900  
Meter Number 5407172  
2000 through 2005
Pitney-Bowes DM100 at South Pole
The electronic PB Model 6900 had to be replaced as part of the Meter Migration Mandate. The fully digital model DM100 was installed in September 2005. However, this model requires full telephone support for frequent security checks. South Pole only had telephone support for a few hours a day. The unit was removed in February 2006.

Pitney-Bowes DM100 Postage Meter
Date: 1 January 2006 South Pole
Rate: $0.80 International First Class Letter
Semi Official USPS Cover.

John Howell
2 Browns Road
Kingston, Tas, 7050
AUSTRALIA
From: Bill Spindler, RPSC  
South Pole Station  
PSC 468 Box 400  
APO AP 96598

To: Ann Arbor MI 48103

U.S. MAIL  
PS. LABEL 136  
FEB. 1971  

SFO  
SAN FRANCISCO  
CALIFORNIA (USA)  

WEIGHT 5.4  
VIA →
FPO Zipcode Errors
Both US Antarctic stations had been maintained by the US Navy until 1998 and the Zipcodes were properly “FPO AP”. In 1998 the US Air Force took over this responsibility and the Zipcodes became “APO AP”. However in 2000 and again in 2006 the new postage meters were delivered with “FPO AP” Zipcode addresses. The errors were corrected for the next season. Meter stamps with these errors can be hard to find.

Postcard—FPO AP 96598 In Error
Date: 13 February 2000 FPO AP 96598
Rate: $0.20 Domestic Postcard
Meter delivered in January 2000 with old Navy FPO designation in the townmark and used for the January and February 2000. This was replaced with proper Air Force APO designation for the next season.

“FPO AP” Zipcode Error
Date: 2 November 2006
Rate: $0.84 International First Class Letter
Once again this new meter arrived with the “FPO” Error. It was used like this 2006/2007 season and fixed for the next season.
Pitney-Bowes DM100 Returns
The older Personal Post meter was officially obsolete as of January 2009. It was used through the end of the 2008/2009 season and replaced with a new Pitney-Bowes DM 100. It is not known what arrangement may have been made to allow this communications needy device to work at South Pole.
Pitney-Bowes Model 5300 moves to US McMurdo Base

The McMurdo post office was operated by the US Navy from 1957 with a complex zip code history. From 1991 to 1998 used FPO 96599. After 1998 the Air Force took over using the zip code APO AP 96599.

The Pitney-Bowes Model 5300 serial 3345117 that had been used at South Pole Station from 1987 was moved to McMurdo and is known to have been used there from 24 August 1995 to 17 October 2000.

This meter was replaced with modern PVI postal meters as mechanical meters became obsolete in 2000.

Reportedly another PB Model 5300 meter was present at McMurdo from 1987 to 1995 but impressions of that unit have never been published.

McMurdo Station
APO AP 96599

Earliest Known Season With Postage Meter
Date: 7 December 1995
Postage: $0.32 Domestic First Class Rate
Postage Meter impression from the first season that meter number 3345117 is known to be used at McMurdo.

Second Season
Date: 20 October 1996
Postage: $0.32 Domestic First Class Rate
Postage Meter impression from meter number 3345117 during its second season at McMurdo.
McMurdo Station
Pitney Bowes Model 5300
Meter Number 3345117
1995 thru 2000

Postcard, World Flags at South Pole
Date: 21 October 1999 McMurdo
Rate: $0.33 Domestic First Class Letter Rate
Posted at McMurdo using the Model 5300 postage meter.

Postcard of McMurdo Station as seen from Observation Hill. Known as Mac Town, it houses about 1100 scientists and support personnel during the Austral Summer. About 200 during winter.

Elaborate McMurdo Cover
Dates: 17 October 2000 McMurdo
18 October 2000 McMurdo
Rate: $0.33 Domestic First Class Letter
Elaborate cover prepared in October 2000 using McMurdo meter 3345117. Reverse (shown below) contains note that delivery was delayed one year due to illness of a clerk.
USAP (US Antarctic Program) operates the bases as shown in circular sticker.
Cachet also depicts a USAF KC-10 Tanker refueling a C-141 cargo aircraft, an essential support operation for many round trip supply flights.
What is a PVI?

Since the late 1990's the US Post Offices have used postage meters made by MOS/Unisys known as PVI's. These units include keyboard, touch screen, scale and printer. Generally known as a Postage Validation Indicia (PVI) Printer. Virtually all US Post Offices changed to the PVI system in 2000.
PVI Priority Package
Date: 22 February 2006
Rate: $8.10 underpaid ($8.85 Priority 4lb to Zone 5)
Personal Items sent home by post after returning from
duty at South Pole Station.
Package Piece with PVI imprint.
McMurdo Post Office Zip Code 96599
Date: 27 August 2009
Rate: $29.88 24 lb 11 oz Parcel Post.
SAM Space Available Mail air cargo.
Note that package senders from Antarctica usu-
ally use their home address in the US for the return
address and not the base address.
US Air Force Post Office at Christchurch

The Christchurch airport is the jump off point for US and NZ Antarctic bases as well as bases of other countries. The US Air Force maintains a post office at the Christchurch airport for use by personnel travelling to and from Antarctica. Handles about 400,000 pounds of mail a year supporting the US Operation Deep Freeze.

Used Pitney-Bowes model 5300 meters until 2000 when Post Office PVI units were installed. Several meter numbers of each meter type are known.

Pitney-Bowes model 5300 postage meter.
Date: 9 November 1999 USAF APO 96531
Rate: $0.66 to NZ. Should be $0.60 international
An APO operates as if it is US Territory. A letter to a New Zealand address considered international.

Air Polarogramme showing LC-130 Hercules at McMurdo Station
Date: 17 October 2000 USAF APO 96531
19 October 2000 USAF APO 96531
25 October 2000 McMurdo
Rate: $0.33 Domestic or $0.60 International
Paid $0.50

Air Polarogrammes are printed by a number of companies with Antarctic themes and are often sold at tourist counters.
First Stop on the way to Antarctica.
Last Stop on the Way Home.
The Christchurch APO post office PVI handles the personal items that cannot be carried onboard as luggage.

Scott F. Smith
South Pole Station
PSC 468 Box 400
APO AP 96596-5400

APO at Christchurch Airport
MOS/Unisys PVI
Used After 2000

PVI With optional Zipcode barcode
Date: 29 September 2008
Rate: $0.41 Domestic Letter

PVI Without optional Zipcode barcode
Date: 29 September 2008
Rate: $0.41 Domestic Letter